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Trees as farms: painting the new landscape

by

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Abstract

A tree farm, in simple terms, is an area of land that has been planted with seedlings of a single timber species to be harvested for its wood. An agricultural farm can be defined as land planted with food crops or pasture for grazing animals. From a visual perspective a farmscape evokes historic, nostalgic notions of the pastoral landscape; whereas a tree farm is silent, moody, ambiguous, and unintelligible.

A consideration of the impacts, both positive and negative, of timber plantations on farming districts and the environment provides the context for this investigation. Discourses of geography and land use, biology, economics and industry contribute to a multivalent viewpoint. I use painting to represent the removal of pasture and the reforestation of the farmscape where traditional crops are replaced by monocultural plantings of trees. Repetitive flora motifs of *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves symbolise the plantations enveloping former pasture. Common farming items are utilised as artefacts, remnants of a history lost. The modular, multi-panelled format employed is informed by Imants Tillers; with particular reference to *Kangaroo Blank* 1988 and his series *Nature Speaks* 1998-2000. Dividing the picture plane into a grid facilitates the removal of random sections, enabling the images to be broken down; with the empty pockets of space providing ambiguity, mystery and a sense of demise. Other artists referenced include David Keeling and Ray Arnold who take decisive political standpoints in their Tasmanian landscapes; Patrick Grieve and his highly stylised farmscapes; Richard Wastell and his portrayal of the vulnerability of the land; and Megan Walch, whose hauntingly dark depictions of tree branches in *Skeletal* 2010 pares back into their dark, grotesque beauty. Edward Hopper's *Gas* 1940 was a pivotal painting presenting the eerie, foreboding, cipher-like characteristics of plantation pine forests.

The significance of the effects that tree farms have on the transformation of the rural landscape has proved a valuable topic for theoretical and visual research. Initially I paid no heed to the existence of tree farms in my local area, but gradually over the course of the project I began to question the impact on and changes to the rural community. Timber plantations loom large over the traditional agricultural landscape, superficially disrupting the pastoral and the picturesque while, as this project has identified, also impacting upon the environment and rural communities.

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Introduction

For more than 50 years tree farms have been part of the Tasmanian rural landscape. Initially they were an accepted form of economic wealth, utilising areas of poor soil; but over the two most recent decades their rapid expansion into higher class agricultural land, and the utilisation of monocultural species, has earned tree farms the condemnation of rural communities. The rapid influx of tree plantations on private farmland has also threatened the notion of the nostalgic pastoral landscape. *Trees As Farms* is a response to both the visual changes to the physicality of the landscape, when agricultural land is replaced with tree plantations, as well as an investigation into the impact on farming communities and the environment. Particular attention is focussed on the North East of Tasmania, where I reside, and I consider the concept of loss of place, and where tree farms sit in relation to this construct. My research for *Trees As Farms* was conducted from the period between August 2008, and October 2012, and has witnessed the demise of managed investment schemes and a downturn in the forest industry due to political and economic factors.

In the final body of work I use painting to represent the removal of pasture and the reforestation of the farmscape and specifically address the visual way the rural landscape changes where traditional crops are replaced by monoculture plantings of trees. A repetitive floral motif of *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves symbolise the plantations substituting pasture, and common traditional agricultural objects are utilised as artefacts, remnants of a history lost.

The contrast between the vertical poles of seemingly impenetrable trees and their vast canopies, and the gently undulating paddocks of pasture and ploughed fields is an abundant visual resource to generate challenging and inventive compositions and debate.



Figure 1. Tree plantation & hay bales, Tasman Highway, East of Nunamara, Tasmania, 13/09/12, digital photographic image: S. Goodall.

This exegesis is divided into four main chapters and a conclusion, and will provide an insight into the significance of the impacts, both negative and positive, that tree farms have on the rural landscape, environment and communities that they encompass.

Chapter 1 is titled 'The Practice and Research of Contemporary Landscapes' and locates the research in its field of practice. In this chapter I discuss the visual impact and the physicality of tree farms and their uneasiness in the traditional rural landscape. I examine the various definitions and descriptors of an agricultural product and consider whether plantation trees can be defined as a farming crop.

Chapter 1 also discusses the historical notion of the traditional pastoral genre, and the relationship to landscape painting and contemporary art in Australia. I discuss pioneering painters Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin, as well as contemporary artists Patrick Grieve and Philip Wolfhagen. This chapter also looks at artists who take decisive political standpoints including Tasmanian painters David Keeling, Richard Wastell and Raymond Arnold, as well as internationally renowned Australian artist Mandy Martin and Scottish artist Peter Doig. Although my literature research initially focussed on painting my work was informed by a review of environmental and land art that included the work of conceptual artists Jan Dibbets and Agnes Denes.

In Chapter 2 'Context of Theory' I discuss the various pragmatic areas of my literature review, outlining utilitarian, scientific and technical studies that represent a departure from subjects directly relating to my visual arts practice. These subjects include: geography and land use; biology; and economics as well as a discourse on the changes to the physicality of the landscape. This chapter also places my practical investigations in context with the impact that tree farms have on rural communities, and the positive and negative impacts of plantations on the environment with a focus on a journalistic and government investigation into *Eucalyptus nitens* contaminating the water near the township of St Helens, Tasmania.

Chapter 3 'Context of Practice' looks at representations of the landscape through earlier discoveries in my studio practice and identifies relevant contemporary paintings and photographic images. Selected Tasmanian, Australian and international artists employing a similar theme, or who have informed *Trees As Farms* include Megan Walch, Karl Blossfelt, Jan Senbergs, and Elizabeth Weckes. Imants Tillers, along with Mandy Martin, provided the inspiration for the multi-panelled grid format I have utilised for my final body of work, which is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 'Major Works & Outcomes' discusses the progress of my studio practice and how the work evolved over the ten different series generated for *Trees As Farms*. In this chapter I identify the significant experiments I have conducted with paint and other mediums, and discuss the implications of many different approaches and styles. Attention is given to the breakthrough pieces, particularly the work that relates to the dispensation of literal compositions to focus on more imaginative or powerful metaphors. The final body of work is also discussed in more detail in this chapter.

One of the biggest difficulties executing the studio investigation and research for *Trees As Farms* has been the vast scope of the subject matter and the difficulty in narrowing down the topic. The crux of my research has been clouded by the sheer volume of material and various avenues of investigation. Venturing into fields of literature investigation not relating specifically to my visual art practice caused fluctuations, vast directional changes and major shifts in scale and style. Conversely however, this knowledge was of great benefit – contributing alternate perceptions and insight.

The second major difficulty I experienced with *Trees As Farms* was a struggle with ambivalence and a noncommittal, dispassionate viewpoint. For most of this project I had taken a neutral approach to my political standing on tree farming as our family farm borders forestry and private plantations (and have faced negative issues associated with their existence) yet I have also been directly employed in the forest industry. However, in late 2011, I took a decisive attitude and started to approach the tree plantations in a negative political standing. This afforded me the opportunity to paint utilising dark, moody, ambiguous atmospheres and powerful metaphors. *Trees As Farms* recognises the evolving transformation of the rural landscape and the effects that tree plantations have had on the surrounding rural communities. It has been a soul searching, challenging, yet immensely rewarding journey.

Chapter 1

The Practice & Research of Contemporary Landscapes

Plantation: a forest stand established by the planting of seedlings or cuttings of trees selected for their wood producing properties and managed intensively for the purpose of future timber harvesting.

(Forest Practices Board 2000, p. 99)

Farm: n. 1) a tract of land, usually with house and buildings, cultivated as a unit or used to rear livestock. 2) a unit of land or water devoted to the growing or rearing of some particular type of vegetable, fruit, animal or fish.

Collins Dictionary & Thesaurus

The above working definitions set the tone for an economic and political debate that has been festering amongst rural communities since managed investment schemes and government incentives helped accelerate the growth of tree plantations onto land traditionally used for broadleaf cropping and pasture. In this chapter I discuss the visual impact and physicality of tree farms and their uneasiness in the traditional rural landscape.

The Tasmanian agricultural landscape has been interspersed with hardwood and softwood timber stands for more than fifty years and plantations were, at least until the late 20th century, not considered as a detriment to traditional farming. However, over the last two decades there has been a significant shift in attitude from agricultural and rural communities which now feel that their traditional intensive cropping and pasture livelihoods are under threat from the growing presence of tree farms.

Despite the modernisation of farming equipment and processes, and more complex commercial business strategies being implemented into the operation of most agricultural businesses, the traditional image of the rural pastoral landscape still sits squarely as the visual representation of current day farming life. Tree farms are vehemently excluded from this model – yet many farmers possess hectares of plantation trees operated as managed investment schemes or as an asset for future cash flow back into the property.

There is considerable argument to dispel the theory of the tree being classified as just another agricultural crop. In *Tasmanian Rural Landscapes: A Study* C.B. Tassell (1988, p. 77) states that ‘...in practice the Tasmanian rural landscape can be viewed as being the product of three major components’, these being: ...’the physical landscape – the relief, and scale’; secondly, ‘...the agricultural practices adopted and undertaken in the landscape’; and lastly, ‘...the cultural elements added to the landscape’. The physical components of the rural landscape mentioned above are for the most part intransigent, and whilst cultural

elements in some civilisations can have tremendous impacts on the environment, in Tasmania Tassell (p. 77) states ‘...it is the agricultural practices that have the greatest potential to alter the character of the rural landscape’. In relation to this then, due to their size and scale, a tree plantation is evidently a crop that can permanently, and semi-permanently, affect the physical landscape.

There are many considerations that may render tree plantations ineligible to be classified as a part of the agricultural landscape and the rural idyll, and I have investigated these in detail. For instance: can an agricultural landscape be defined singularly by the purpose of its crop? Can you only assign rurality to a landscape if it features a food source? As an example let us consider the deliberately simplistic viewpoint published in *The Examiner* newspaper’s forum (3 February 2010, p. 21). Concerned about private forestry spraying practices, beef breeder Peter W. Goss of Beaconsfield writes: ‘The trees are supposed to be a so-called crop. I am sure you can’t eat trees, can you?’ His tongue-in-cheek remark is illustrative of the passion shown by traditional farmers towards the establishment of vast areas of tree plantations. Goss is correct – plantation trees are not a source of food but neither are many other agricultural products including cotton, poppies, and a relatively new industry; the farming of sunflower oils for bio-fuel. However, as these crops are similar in size and duration of growth, none of these crops challenge the notion of a traditional agricultural property.

The water consumption of a tree farm, particularly in the first years of a plantation’s establishment when high volumes of water are required during the initial growth spurts of the trees, has often been identified and lamented by many Tasmanian farmers as well as rural community members who have concerns with what they consider to be excessive water usage.

Height can be entertained as a possible descriptor that could eliminate farmed trees as being classified as just another agricultural crop. Although some wheat and cereal plants can reach several metres tall, and hop plantations can have vines climb up to 9m high (Penrose 2012) most traditional forage or vegetable crops rarely grow above a metre high. *Eucalyptus nitens*, commonly known as Shining Gum, is a widely used hardwood plantation timber in Tasmania which can reach up to 60m or higher in optimal growing conditions. Also given the right environment, Radiata Pine (*Pinus Radiata*), a common softwood plantation species, can reach these heights and beyond. With the resulting giant canopies that develop, we must consider the radical impact this has on the climate, light and shade on the ground and waterways (rivers and streams) below.

Once harvested, the remaining plant waste from traditional forage or vegetable crops quickly decomposes and is tilled back into the soil, making the land available to be restored to pasture or alternative cropping within weeks. Timber trees however, are solid and

weighty, and once harvested their waste does not easily break down into the soil as organic matter unless chipped or burnt. Farmed trees require minimal management (requiring only occasional pruning, fertilisation and spraying) and are usually administered by external contractors. Food crops and pasture require constant care and maintenance, and are far more labour intensive.

Finally, the tree plantation is a long-term investment with yields not being recovered for around 25 years, depending on species grown. This means that the usage of the land can be misconstrued and considered permanently as a tree plantation, despite it not being irreversibly able to grow food crops or pasture in the future. On the other hand vegetable or forage crops are usually only in the ground for one season (less than six months). Tree plantations stand tall and silent; they are a dense, dark crop, engulfing the topography, dramatically and semi-permanently altering the visual landscape. This removes them firmly from the notion of being a traditional agricultural property.

Although my investigation relates to the period of land occupation between traditional agricultural land use and plantation tree farming, I believe that it is necessary to complement my research with a historical perspective beginning from when our early settlers began to colonise the land. Dense bushland consisting of indigenous scrub, native trees and temperate rainforests eventually ceded to open pastures consisting of introduced species of ryegrasses and clover. Dark thickets of tea-tree, bracken and towering eucalypts were slowly replaced by open, sunny plains of fluorescent green meadows. Livestock were imported and bred, and prospered on the virgin farmlands, while native species including wallaby, wombats, quolls and devils, were either culled or forced back into the surrounding forests.

Two centuries on since colonisation, the populace of Tasmania have accepted the long-established agricultural lands as being the conventional, orthodox usage of the land. This is particularly true in the North with areas of rich, fertile alluvial soils that favour the dairy farming, beef cattle and cropping industries, but also applies to the Midlands and Lower Derwent plains that are best suited to sheep grazing. Tasmanians have become accustomed to the laid-back country lifestyle and many mainland Australians are making the 'sea-change' to the rural ideal – buying and moving to small hobby-farm acreages and commuter properties around the state. Given this premise, it is not surprising that many people in rural communities feel that their lifestyle is threatened by the introduction of hardwood and softwood plantations and the modern management practices involved in producing trees for harvesting.

The traditional pastoral landscape has been well represented by pioneering Australian painters, particularly between the 1880s and 1940s, often images of the suburban fringe.

Plein air artists Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin represented the bush genre and the hardships of everyday colonial life. Living and working in the blue-gum forests of southern Victoria these artists held a deep affection for the environment that they painted (Lansdowne 1982). Members of the Heidelberg School, these painters captured the light, colours and vegetation of the native Australian bush. Instead of producing works that adapted the Australian vista into one that more resembled the landscapes of Europe and Britain, the Heidelberg School artists chose to paint a true representation of the native bushland and pioneering farmlands. Streeton's painting *Golden Summer, Eaglemont 1888* is a typical example, with particular emphasis on the farming idyll, illustrated in this painting by the use of warm tones and the serene, peaceful setting. (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Arthur Streeton, *Golden Summer Eaglemont*, 1888, oil on canvas, 81.3x152.4cm, National Gallery, Victoria.

Australian artists continued to paint the traditional pastoral, fascinated by the activities of the primary industry and of the agricultural landscape, up until the mid 20th Century. In her book *Australian Pastoral: The Making of a White Landscape* (2007) Jeanette Hoorn terms the emphasis on the values of pastoral rural ownership in Australia as 'pastorophilia'. However, Hoorn claims that after the Second World War Australian pastoral painting 'entered a mannerist phase before its slow demise in the second half of the 20th Century' and instead, artists preferred to create sublime landscapes devoid of the presence of man. (Hoorn 2007, pp. 231-232).

Moving from the 20th into the 21st century, Tasmanian artists Patrick Grieve, and Philip Wolfhagen both feature the island state's agricultural industry as the subject of their landscapes. Grieve in particular is fascinated by the colourful grid patterns of the farmland views from his home at Burnie. Rich chocolate colours of freshly tilled basalt soil contrast with the bright greens of the heavily irrigated pasture and the vivid whites and subtle pinks of poppy crops. Grieve also plays on the juxtaposition of the farmland and its closeness to

the sea on the North West Coast, eloquently observed in his oil painting *Farmland Coastal Series No. 63*, 2008, (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Patrick Grieve, *Farmland Coastal Series No. 63*, 2008, oil on linen, 150x150cm, Bett Gallery Hobart.

On the other hand Wolfhagen paints atmospheric, emotive Tasmanian landscapes and the farming country of the midlands area has been featured regularly in his work. In a similar vein to Hoorn, Peter Timms points out that ‘the pastoral presents some particular problems for landscape artists, which is why few are game to tackle the subject’ (Timms 2005, p. 36). Issues include the loss of social significance in the pastoral (we no longer hark back to our pioneering days) and the lack of romance in the use of heavy machinery and intensive current day farming practices.

Wolfhagen’s painting *Boundary Between Light and Dark*, 2000 (Fig. 4) is a pastoral scene of Liawenee that he has painted many times during his career but in the most recent work he has included a wire and timber livestock fence – significantly this is only the second time a manmade artefact has appeared in Wolfhagen’s paintings. The appearance of the fence is incredibly symbolic because it recognises that ‘wilderness is a relative concept, as much a construction of the mind as it is any real place’ (Timms 2005, p. 36). Importantly however, Wolfhagen is also boldly acknowledging the existence of the pastoral and its importance to Australian society, something we appear to have blotted out from our psyche for at least the last 60 years. Timms affirms this by stating that ‘cleared fields dotted with

livestock or tilled for crops can no longer be seen as socially significant in the way they were a hundred years ago, when sturdy pioneers were carving a confident new nation out of the bush' (Timms 2005, p. 36). The classic pastoral landscape and its seemingly inoffensive existence has been relegated to the past. For this project I also shun painting in the style of 'pastoraphilia', rejecting my initial panoramic farmscapes for the project, preferring instead to use depth and tonality to embrace the ambiguous and emotive in my work. I will expand on this further in Chapter 4.

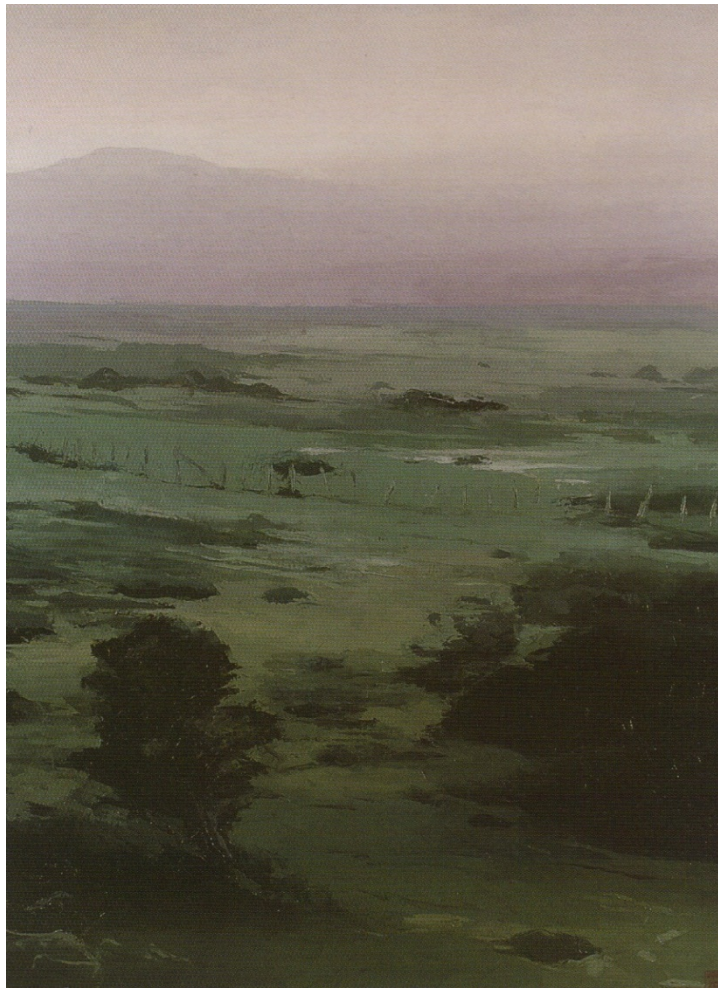


Figure 4. Philip Wolfhagen, *Boundary Between Light and Dark*, 2000, oil and beeswax on linen, 214x158cm, private collection.

Wolfhagen's relationship with the pastoral is also not without emotion or anxiety as he laments for the scenic farmscapes he knew as a child. In this instance it is not related to the imposition of tree farms, but from the subtle changes that have been implemented with advances in technology and subsequent adaption of modern agricultural practices. Wolfhagen bemoans the de-romanticising of the landscape with the removal of hawthorn hedges and small fields, this land then converted to vast areas of pasture capable of bearing huge steel pivot irrigators and bales of hay cocooned in brightly coloured plastic wrap. Whilst sympathetic to landholders and their need to remain productive, he feels that 'from an aesthetic point of view it is hard not to lament the loss of a very beautiful

'countryside, a term he uses specifically because of its antecedent in the English model (McCormick & Rhodes 2008, p. 81). I speculate that Wolfhagen would feel an even greater sense of loss if the agricultural environment of the district(s) he inhabits and works in, were even more radically altered by conversion into stands of monocultural trees and subsequently the pastoral vista utterly removed from the landscape. It would be intriguing to see some of his work reflect this scenario. However Wolfhagen is not an overtly opinionated artist and favours the incorporation of subtle references in his work. Wolfhagen does not shun the use of political implications in his paintings, but prefers to allow the viewer to form their own conclusions from the material that he provides.

Three Tasmanian landscape artists, who are not reticent in highlighting affairs of state, or in taking decisive political standpoints, are David Keeling, Richard Wastell and Raymond Arnold, all of whom have informed my project to a significant extent, which I discuss further in Chapter 3. Keeling's work is poetic yet powerful in its description of ecological destruction. Wastell's political tones are juxtaposed with his portrayal of the vulnerability of the land, and Arnold depicts the commodification of the landscape, with no better example than in his painting *Western Mountain Ecology – The relationship between things rather than the things themselves*, 2006, (Fig. 5) where his racks of milled *Huon Pine* represent a diametrically opposed viewpoint to that of a traditional landscape painting.



Figure 5. Raymond Arnold, *Western Mountain Ecology – The relationship between things rather than the things themselves*, 2006, Acrylic on canvas (diptych) 81x122cm, John Glover Society.

Nationally and internationally renowned Australian artist Mandy Martin also questions our notion of nature and our relationship to it. Although Martin's work is derived from working

in the desert in Central Australia, my project has benefited from her references to the degradation of the landscape from industrial monoliths such as power stations, pipelines and other industrial plants, juxtaposed with the ancient earthy red soils of the outback, which I elaborate on in more detail in Chapter 3.

From an international perspective, Scottish artist Peter Doig has informed my project. His mystical painting *Concrete Cabin*, 1994 (Fig. 6) of Le Corbusier's apartment block hidden in the shadows by a stand of trees; forces the viewer into a perplexing conundrum between the brightly coloured overtly man-made modernist building and the natural, undomesticated pristine forest.



Figure 6. Peter Doig, *Concrete Cabin*, 1994, Oil on canvas, 198x275cm, Saatchi Gallery, London.

My literature research has not been entirely restricted to the work of painters, but given the broad range of subject matter available I purposely aimed to focus on two dimensional mediums. However, my knowledge was enhanced with investigations into environmental and land art – a genre that developed during the 1960s when artists stopped representing the landscape and turned instead to directly manipulating it. In his film *12 Hours Tide Objects with Correction of Perspective* made for television in 1969, Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets recorded a tractor ploughing furrows into the sand on a beach at low tide. Although Dibbets was concerned with the ephemeral nature of this work, to me its appeal lies in the whimsical employment of a tractor; such a practical piece of equipment, being used in such a non-functional manner as well as the pattern and form of the furrows generated in an environment completely alien from that which it is normally utilised.

Agnes Denes, born in Hungary, raised in Sweden and educated in the United States, has an artistic practice engaged with aesthetics and socio-political concepts. *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule 10,000 Trees, 10,000 People, 400 Years*, 1982, (Fig. 7) was as its name suggests, an innovative mass planting of trees onto a man-made mountain constructed on former gravel pits. To 'help alleviate the world's ecological stress' (Kastner

1998, p. 161) the Finnish government sponsored the project and has protected the site for the next four centuries. My interest in this work is twofold: firstly it encompasses enormous community and government involvement with a project that has clear parallels to tree farming, and secondly that despite the mathematical 'pineapple pattern' planting arrangement of the trees, in time, due to the ban on harvesting, it will regenerate as forest.



Figure 7. Agnes Denes, *Tree Mountain – A Living Time Capsule 10,000 Trees, 10,000 People, 400 Years*, 1982, Pinsio gravel pits, Ylojarvi, Finland.

Returning to the notion of 'pastoraphilia', from an aesthetic perspective the horizontal panoramas of rolling green hills, gently undulating paddocks of pasture and ploughed fields lined with stock fences and dotted with farm sheds and amenities; are in stark contrast with the vertical poles of impenetrable tree trunks and their vast, engulfing canopies. The resulting transformation is clearly evident and no amount of planning or management can significantly lessen the visual impact of a monoculture plantation intended for timber harvesting. The contrast between such differing landscapes provides an abundant visual resource to generate challenging and inventive compositions, and has formed the foundations for my studio practice.

Chapter 2

Context for the Visual Research

As discussed in Chapter 1, landscape paintings have traditionally focussed on the nostalgic notion of the agricultural; depicting charming, rural scenes of beauty and simplicity. A monocultural tree plantation landscape cannot be regarded and treated in the same way, yet they do possess an allure in their darkness and mystery.

Initially the aim of my studio practice was to depict tree farms as innocuous, matching my earlier attitudes. I found their sheer contrast in appearance to pasture land an intriguing source of visual exploration and was eager to investigate the creative possibilities. However, over the course of the project I responded to the existence of these plantations in a different way and started regarding them as invasive and undesirable. As my viewpoint began to alter and I progressed to observing the dark, disturbing and sinister attributes of the tree farms, I began painting in a reductive manner to capture a sense of their mystery and foreboding. This perspective afforded the opportunity to create works that contradict conventional representations of the nostalgic pastoral landscape.

I have incorporated a range of sources into the text-based research as it has afforded me a much greater insight into the topic and has provided the impetus to experiment with contemporary representations of tree farms and the rural landscape, in my studio practice. This chapter will discuss the various pragmatic areas of my literature review outlining utilitarian, scientific and technical studies that represent a departure from subjects directly relating to my visual art practice. I have found value in taking a holistic approach to this research: it has been a diverse source of creative inspiration for my exegesis.

The first area I investigated was geography and land use; material pertaining to the direct study of land used for agriculture and forested land used for economic profit. John Fraser Hart (1998, p. 2) classifies the three principal components of any landscape as being:

- (1) The landforms, or the features of the land surface which usually influence its patterns of vegetation and the ways in which people can use it; (2) The vegetation, or the plants that cover the surface; and (3) The structures people have added.

Locally, in *Tasmanian Rural Cultural Landscapes: A Study* by C.B. Tassell (1988, p. 77) also classifies the land into three major components:

- (1) The physical landscape – the relief and scale that contrasts with the mainland of Australia; (2) The agricultural practices adopted and undertaken in the landscape; and (3) The cultural elements added to the landscape.

The structure and way the land is formed generally determines its use in agriculture, and this along with the climate and weather determine the types of crops planted in an area. However tree plantations are not fastidious about their growing environment; in fact many species of *Eucalyptus* are renowned for their ability to survive in harsh climates, thriving in dry conditions and poor soils, as well as possessing the ability to grow on precipitous slopes. With agriculture the difficulty with steep land has always been in the harvesting, but cable logging operations make it possible to harvest timber relatively easily and efficiently with minimal damage to the land. Paintings of rolling grass clad hills firmly fit the pastoral stereotype, and many Australian artists have painted hilltops endowed with the subtle hues of native forest. Tree farms however, remain an enigma – not quite fitting the requirements of an agricultural scenic vista.

Hart (1998, p. 2) states that ‘the most obvious manifestations of land-survey systems on the visible landscape are the fences that mark field boundaries’. I have often driven past eucalypt plantations that have been established on land previously used for agricultural purposes and been bemused at the wire fences retained from their previous use. In a practical sense it is prudent to preserve the barriers to guard against wildlife, vermin and stray animals from neighbouring farms, but from an aesthetic point of view the fences look somewhat absurd, as though they are barricading in the trees. However, this was a fundamental discovery in my research, as fencing and its association with bordering and segregating the land, is featured in my final body of work (discussed further in Chapter 4). Hart also concedes that ‘the rural landscape no longer belongs solely to farmers, if indeed it ever did. Larger and larger numbers of city people are claiming a right to use the countryside, and conflict over its right and proper use will inevitably increase’. Hart is referring to the rural landscape in the United States of America but his statement is just as valid here in Tasmania – people no longer see country areas as existing purely for traditional agricultural purposes and are open to new investments and opportunities.

Economics was also a revealing subject for the literature review. The economic viability of the land, whether it exists in the form of mining, agriculture, industry or tourism, will always impact on its physical attributes. More than 20 years ago Tassell (1988, p. 4) wrote that ‘the landscape cannot be expected to be a fixed never changing entity. Rather it will continue to change largely as a consequence of the market forces that shape the [agricultural] industry’. This statement stands true today and human activity will always impact and alter the landscape offering a myriad of opportunities for the artist to portray, from those still hoping to capture something of that traditional ‘pastoraphilia’ idyll or those, including myself, who wish to focus on the unorthodox and unconventional attributes of land use.

The planting of trees as a crop is certainly not a new initiative; landowners have been planting small plots of monoculture plantations as investments for many decades. In addition, large scale planting and groupings of single tree species has been carried out by farmers long before tree plantations were brought to prominence. Aside from the use of trees for pulpwood and sawlog timber production, the agriculture sector has grown and harvested trees for the purposes of fencing and building materials, firewood, and as shelter belts to protect stock and crops. There are also less economic applications including aesthetic planting for landscaping, sport and recreation and for conservation along river banks and streams to reduce erosion. In *Trees As A Farm Crop* (Richards 1988, p. 4) writes 'whether it will be feasible to grow the sort of trees that will most readily meet the objectives chosen will depend on the type of ground available for planting.' Richards adds that 'Most farmers will wish first to plant up their less productive land.' My supposition is that no farmer would plant their prime soil acreage with tree stands whilst still operating a profitable business, particularly in light of the recent resurgence in the agricultural sector and downturn in the timber industry. The most significant decline in the forest and timber sector has occurred during the latter two years of this project, almost to its demise.

Up until the last two years Tasmania had seen a significant upward shift in plantation development over two decades, primarily due to the heavily subsidised Managed Investment Schemes (MIS), and backed by a strong campaign from the forest industry, all aiming to secure private sector investors. Tony O'Hara (in Keeney & Abbott 2005, p. 80) states that 'from 1994 to 2003, about 452,000 hectares of new plantations were established in Australia'. The investment into forestry farming was also accelerated by low acreage prices for land retained for traditional agricultural purposes. O'Hara also states (2005, p. 80) that of the funds used to establish new plantations, the majority (63 per cent) were sourced from MIS schemes and that hardwood species dominated the plantation boom, with 78 per cent of land being planted with short rotation timber. This is an important figure as it is typical of the planting in my local community and as a consequence, it is the monocultural hardwood trees such as *Eucalyptus nitens* that I find the most thought provoking.

Despite various politicians claiming that Tasmania would become 'the food bowl of Australia', people working the land were facing financial hardship and were often given little choice but to sell their pastured land for tree plantation development. In 2012, a more positive outlook for traditional agricultural practices is emerging although competition from cheap overseas imports is still causing concern for local producers. The surge in plantation investment was a key element that fuelled the initial premise for this project. In terms of my research it is unfortunate that the industry downturn has removed some of the potency from the tree farm debate. Regardless, the existing tree plantation investments are still standing, surviving until they reach their full potential and harvested as a timber commodity. They are therefore still relevant as the nucleus of my project.

The changes to the physicality of the landscape are radical and far-reaching. Although the managers and contractors associated with both crown and private forests giving due consideration to the visual impact on the countryside when planning an area for plantation, inevitably the planting will have a significant impact. Ultimately when a towering species such as *Eucalyptus nitens* is planted, the changes to the landscape will be overwhelmingly obvious. To minimise the visual and long term impacts The Forest Practices Code states that 'operations generally cannot, and need not, be hidden from view, but can be designed to reduce visual impact and harmonise with the local visual character and land use patterns' (Forest Practices Board 2000, p. 65). In the case of native plantation trees abutting areas of indigenous forest, the repetitive, even-aged, monoculture species of the plantation, planted in symmetrical rows often with a residual carpet of ryegrasses underfoot from the land's previous use, possesses an appearance strikingly different to the scenery of its random, diverse cousins. However, these systematic patterns are not necessarily repugnant and if utilised more sensitively could become an area of aesthetic wonder like that of Agnes Denes' *A Living Time Capsule 10,000 Trees, 10,000 People, 400 Years*, 1982, (Chapter 1, Fig. 7).

The physical appearance of the plantation trees became the catalyst for another subject I focussed on as part of the literature review – biology. After my first practical experimentations using rubber stamps I became conscious of the need to investigate the physicality and structure of the trees; from their trunks and bark, through to their leaves and stems. In particular I was eager to utilise the structure and formation of the eucalypt leaf. Although it is more than 60 years since its publication, Janet Somerville's *Tasmanian Timber Trees*, (c1948) was a valuable resource. Somerville enhanced her educational manual with uncomplicated yet accurate black and white drawings of tree trunks, leaves, flowers and buds. One of the trees depicted in the book, Stringy bark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) (c1948, p. 4) has interesting textured layers of shaggy bark and this was featured in several of the works for the project, particularly the *Plough Tree*, 2009, series. Stringy Gum (*Eucalyptus regnans*) has always been a personal favourite with its elongated strips of faint blossom pink and brown bark hanging like torn shards from the trunk.

The leaf however, continued to be an obsession which resurfaced regularly throughout all my practical studio investigations. In previous works where I utilised repetitive patterns of flora, the leaves became androgynous and uniform. For this project I decided to take a converse approach and study eucalypt leaves in detail. Shining Gum (*Eucalyptus nitens*) is native to Victoria and whilst closely related to the Tasmanian Blue Gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*) it has only been grown in Tasmania for the past 30 years (Williams, D 2010) and therefore does not appear in Somerville's publication. To ensure the most accurate representation of *Eucalyptus nitens* I purchased a tray of seedlings from a local wholesale plant nursery. The juvenile trees had a broader leaf and possessed more predominantly

pink colourings than the foliage of their mature counterparts, but were nevertheless important to my study of this plant, giving insight into the uniqueness of each sapling and the manner in which I could incorporate this individuality into my paintings. *E. Nitens Potato*, 2011 (Fig. 42) was a direct result of this investigation, and is discussed further in Chapter 4.

As the project progressed and my attitude to the tree farms moved to a negative political standpoint, I began focussing on the dark, disturbing and sinister attributes of tree farms. My literature review was then concentrated towards the effect plantations were having on communities as well as the positive and negative environmental impacts. Having come to regard the tree plantations in a disturbing or disconcerting manner I began to consider the impact that tree farming has on a local community, and the negative consequences to the residents of those communities. In his essay 'A Moment of Awakening' for the book *Beyond Reasonable Drought* (Campbell & Watson 2010, p. 2) Martin Flanagan writes about feeling a loss of place. Flanagan describes many childhood journeys from Burnie to Rosebery on the west coast of Tasmania where he recollects fond memories of the scenery of indigenous native forest, the sense that they belonged '...in some ancient, intimate way' and then his feelings after he returned to the area as an adult to see them replaced by row after row of tree plantations. He writes 'it is trite to speak of a sense of loss arising from such an experience, but I have no other way of expressing it...' Flanagan's words would ring true to anyone who has experienced a dramatic change to a familiar place that was once treasured, or valued in some way to them. It is clear that he feels a strong sense of loss as these ancient stands have been superseded by homogenous plantations.

Farming families are especially vulnerable to the emotions involved with a loss of place. Most agricultural properties in Tasmania are owned, managed and operated as family businesses, with the children raised and educated in traditional farming practices handed down from generation to generation. They live and survive on the land and the property becomes more than just a livelihood to them. Unfortunately many factors can force a family with no choice but sell up and leave their property (this is discussed in detail in Appendix 1.a.) Until the recent forest industry downturn, private tree plantation companies were able to offer attractive prices to farmers for their agricultural land. However, whilst the financial gain might be significantly greater, there is a huge emotional impact on the family leaving their property behind and unfortunately it also encompasses and substantially affects their neighbours and the community they are removing themselves from (this topic is expanded further in Appendix 1.b.)

In my research for this project I have taken into consideration a number of negative environmental issues that raise questions in regard to plantation forestry. These include: excessive consumption of underground water reservoirs, pollution and contamination of the water supply (refer Appendix 1.c), concerns with toxic chemical usage and overspray from

aerial spraying (refer Appendix 1.d) and the impact on browsing fauna and other species of indigenous wildlife. However the replanting of trees in the landscape can also create significant positive environmental gains, principally the sequestration of carbon to balance greenhouse gas emissions (refer Appendix 1.e).

Since the establishment of tree plantations there has been unease from environmentalists and community groups in regard to the aerial spraying of pesticides over the plantations, and concerns with the chemicals entering neighbouring water catchments that supply domestic drinking water to local communities. The issue was sensationally brought to public attention in February 2010 when the Australian Broadcasting Corporation screened two episodes of their 'Australian Story' program titled 'Something in the Water'. This report highlighted a general practitioner's concerns about aerial spraying near the upper catchments above the St Helens region. At this time I had reached a period of indecision and temporary lull in enthusiasm for my project and this documentary re-ignited my interest in tree farms. I watched the journalistic investigations with great interest and discovered a paradox in terms of the health of my family and community (which is also surrounded by plantations of *Eucalyptus nitens*) and the vitality of my own project.



Figure 8. Water sampling the Georges River, St Helens, Tasmania, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2010).

'Something in the Water' gave a detailed account of toxic water and noxious foam found in the George's River (Fig. 8). Initially it was thought to be caused by aerial pesticides but was later found to be produced by a chemical found in the oil of *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves. I discuss *Something in the Water*, its implications and the results of the government investigation in more detail in Appendix 1.f. Importantly this investigation was responsible for a significant shift in my studio practice, that is the substantiation and employment of the *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves motif which ultimately lead to the *Nitens Leaves & Objects* series and the paintings that I have produced for the final body of work.

Most of the utilitarian, scientific and technical literature information that I have read and engaged with has been of considerable benefit to the project. Often this may be in an indirect or subconscious manner, but in due course it ultimately comes forth into my studio practice.

Chapter 3

Context of Practice

A primary aim for *Trees As Farms* has been to tell a story through observation and metaphor. In a previous body of work *Shadows of Garibaldi: the remains of a Chinese Settlement*, 2007-2008, I embedded the narrative in symbolic representations, and utilised the strengths of pattern and form to create a dialogue between the remnant artefacts and native Tasmanian flora. Essentially, it was these elements that I wished to harness and employ in my studio research in this project.

The literature search that I have undertaken to inform *Trees As Farms* has encompassed photography, land and environmental art, and includes an investigation into painters whose work embraces overt political overtones. In this Chapter I shall discuss where my studio research is located in the current frame of reference.

Photography has always been an important part of my studio process. I am not an artist who enjoys painting *en plein-air*, although I have used this method occasionally. Rather I prefer the ambience and sanctuary of a studio, and photography affords me this convenience. For this project I have researched landscape photography, photographic literature and photographic artists. *The Wild Ride, Revolutions that Shaped Tasmanian Black and White Wilderness Photography* Haygarth (2008) showcases the wild Tasmanian landscape which is captured magnificently in black and white photography. Pertaining more specifically towards scenes featuring mountainous peaks, native rainforest and woodlands and photographed mainly between 1880 and 1940, the images reflect a time gone by as well as a sincere sense of awe and admiration on the part of the photographer. The twisted tree image in *The Cap [Frenchmans Cap] from Camp on Lake Tahune* 1931 (Fig. 9) is a quintessential example of the type of structure and configuration I desired to incorporate into my *Plough Tree*, 2008, series of paintings.

The contorted, writhing tree trunk in Smithies image is akin to Megan Walch's *Wild Woods 1*, 2009, (Fig. 10) Issue #220 of *Art Monthly Australia* (Edwards 2009, p. 75). Stripping images back to their basic composition and form, based on black and white photographic studies aided my experimentation resulting in my use of only one or two colours from the palette. I used this style extensively in the series *Nitens Leaves & Objects*, 2010, which I discuss further in Chapter 4.

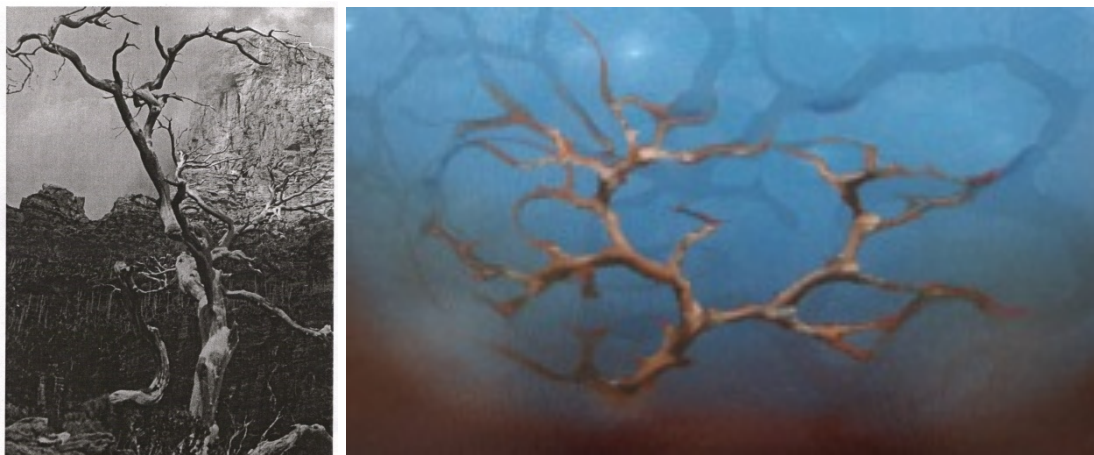


Figure 9. Fred Smithies, *The Cap [Frenchmans Cap]* from *Camp on Lake Tahune*, 1931, lantern slide photographic image, collection of Margaret Carrington.

Figure 10. Megan Walch, *Wild Woods 1* (detail) 2009, Oil on canvas, 112x112cm, private collection.

Karl Blossfeldt's photography in *Natural Art Forms* (Blossfeldt, Wilde & Wilde 1997) is noteworthy. His analytical close-ups of plant stems and flowers and their natural shapes, patterns and forms afforded me with new ways of utilising plants, particularly leaves, in my work (Fig. 11). The images photographed by Blossfeldt are unlike the botanical drawings of *Eucalyptus* trees that I researched (refer to Chapter 2) as they possess a compelling visual aesthetic. Blossfeldt's perception of the poetic and his recognition of decorative elements of naturally occurring figurative patterns turn his images into works of art, rather than journal records.



Figure 11. Karl Blossfeldt, *Saxifraga Willkommiana*, 1928, photographic image, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Another aspect of my research has been into land and environmental art. In this art form 'artists regard the environment as a historical narrative which provides a repertoire of potent symbols that can also be deployed to describe contemporary society' (Kastner 1998, p. 174). Although this movement is more about working within the land and mostly embraces performance, I found inspiration in the thought-provoking, overt political references that

underlie much of this work. I discussed in Chapter 1 Agnes Denes (Fig. 7) and her land reclamation project. Harriet Feigenbaum is another artist working in this genre. Her project *Erosion and Sedimentation Plan for Red Ash and Coal Silt Area – Willow Rings*, 1985, (Fig. 12) converted a 6 hectare site, damaged from mining activities, into a wetland wildlife preserve. Similarly to Denes, Feigenbaum has meticulously planted the forest willow trees in three perfect circles around a man-made pond (Kastner 1998, p. 149).



Figure 12. Harriet Feigenbaum, *Erosion and Sedimentation Plan for Red Ash and Coal Silt Area - Willow Rings*, planted 1985, willow trees on 6 hectares, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Representations of the landscape are never innocuous or innocent. The subtlety or obviousness of each composition forms the basis of whether or not a painting immediately reflects particular attitudes or standpoints to the viewer. A landscape painting cannot be dismissed as merely a record or snapshot of the rural landscape. Edward Hopper's *Gas*, 1940, (Fig. 13) is a good representation of a pine plantation appearing as uninviting, perhaps even threatening. An initial study of this painting draws the viewer's eye immediately to the figure at the fuel pump. Upon further investigation however, the viewer is drawn to the uniform, static formation of pine trees inhabiting the background of the composition. How is it that a simple row of trees could possibly be a threatening menace to the sole human inhabitant of the painting, or to any person or creature? Yet in his artwork Hopper has managed to create a sense of the plantation bearing down on the personal space of the gas station attendant. In *Gas* the trees convey a sense of the sinister, eerie, and possibly even spine-chilling evil. The trees do not appear to be the obvious focal point of the painting yet are integral to creating the atmosphere and mood of the environment surrounding the gas station, with the dark row of pine trees suggesting a mystery and ambiguity.



Figure 13. Edward Hopper, *Gas*, 1940, Oil on canvas, 67cm x 102cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Jan Senbergs' monochromatic images of Tasmania's West coast mining areas informed the project on an aesthetic level as well as from his politically overt viewpoint. The desolation of the mining town Queenstown, in stark contrast to the dense forest that surrounds the settlement, was the inspiration for his drawings and paintings of Queenstown and Mt Lyell (Fig. 14). Patrick McCaughey (2006, p. 9) describes Senbergs as an 'immigrant who forms and focuses a distinctive view of his adopted country, both its physical presence in landscape and cityscape, and its culture and mores'. Senbergs' work typically depicts industrial destruction and desolation in landscapes that demonstrate a brutal uncompromising aesthetic.

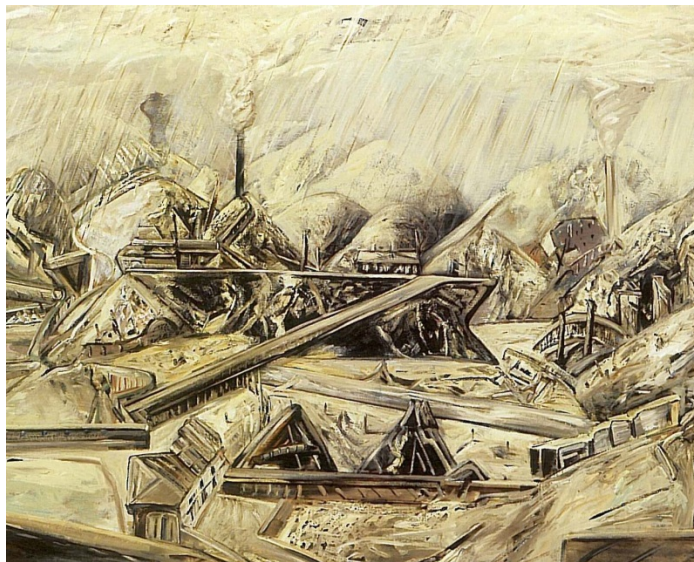


Figure 14. Jan Senbergs, *Sulphur Rain*, 1983, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 122x152cm, private collection.

David Keeling is a Tasmanian artist I have revered for many years and his 'combination of figuration, narrative and landscape – to describe Australia's shorter and sadder history of invasion and ecological destruction' (Hansen & Keeling 2007) has added an important dimension to my research. His images are classically beautiful and picturesque, yet

challenge the viewer to evaluate the subliminal message woven into his work (Fig. 15). Keeling's paintings are poetic, yet very powerful. From a stylised, practical perspective I admire his depiction of wooded areas and his use of bare branches and sinuous John Glover-like tree trunks.



Figure 15. David Keeling, Gate, 1994, Oil on linen, 183 x 152.5cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

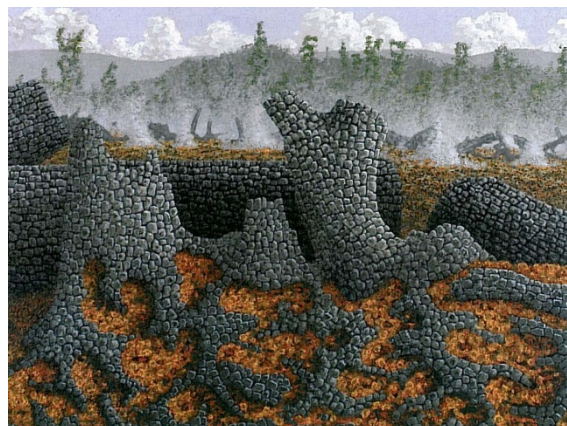


Figure 16. Richard Wastell, Black Roots, 2006, Oil and marble dust on linen, 132 x 182cm, private collection.

Richard Wastell is another Tasmanian landscape painter whom I admire and I applaud his courage in painting scenes that most mainstream artists would prefer to avoid. In his series *We are Making a New World*, 2006, he transcends the political forestry debate with his exquisite paintings of an area devastated by clearfelling for woodchips. The tree trunks (or what is left of them) are depicted as either charred or still burning, these stark yet beautiful structures all that remain from the harvesting process (Fig. 16). Despite this the works are very ethereal and spiritual and suggest a faint glimmer of optimism with the occasional fern rising out of the ashes.

Mandy Martin is a nationally and internationally renowned Australian artist who questions our notion of nature and our relationship to it. Most of Martin's work has been created from her collaborative experiences painting in the desert in Central Australia. For *Trees As Farms* however, it is her recent work *Wanderers in the Desert of the Real*, 2011, that I am most drawn to. There are two elements to this: firstly for her interest in the degradation of the landscape and her depiction of the cause – power stations, pipelines, refineries and other industrial monoliths. Utilising the colours of Australia's rich red soils, Martin paints the smoke stacks of heavy industry spewing forth a thick smoke cloud into a bloody, orange sky (Fig. 17). The second element of my interest in Martin's body of work is in the practical and relates to the arrangement she has employed by the utilisation of triptychs and multi-panelled canvasses. Both Martin and Imants Tillers have informed the format of my final body of work (expanded upon further in Chapter 4).



Figure 17. Mandy Martin, *Dust Storm/Power Station* 2011, pigment and oil on linen, 180x180cm, private collection.

I have been impressed by the large scale oil paintings by Elizabeth Weckes, which depict apocalyptic, atmospheric backgrounds supporting animated alien-like flowering plants (Fig. 44). In *Songs For Skylla*, 2006 a catalogue of works, Manfred Schneckenburger describes Weckes' world 'as emphatic as it is universal' and depicts the works as 'scenes of catastrophe as well as the pure lust of observation, aggression as well as consolation' (Weckes 2006, p. 103). It was these works that were brought to my mind when I commenced the groundwork for the potato paintings (refer Chapter 4).

Along with Mandy Martin, Imants Tillers' informed my final body of work with his multi-panelled canvas board grid format. Graham Coulter-Smith (2002, p. 161) notes that 'Tillers began to experiment with canvas-boards in 1981 [and] the technique is so successful that it has become a hallmark of his style'. Several years ago Charles Blackman's *The Chess Garden*, 1984-85, stimulated my initial interest to attempt the use of geometric grid patterns, but it was Tiller's canvas-board system that incited my enthusiasm to use this arrangement for *Trees As Farms*. However, whilst Tiller's oblong formats would afford me the opportunity to resemble a large scale painting without any of the practicality issues associated with the construction or handling of such a large canvas stretcher; my motive is intended towards the use of the grid, with the resulting linear effect adding an element of mystery to my work. (I elaborate on this further in Chapter 4). Importantly this format also affords the opportunity to incorporate the use of missing segments - like mislaid pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, a metaphor for what was once there, which is now gone.

With my final body of work it is my intention to produce paintings that evoke a sense of loss. I wish to demonstrate a connection between the demise of traditional agricultural practices and the increase in tree farms without being overly obvious with my intentions. Whilst I applaud the overtly political methods utilised by Senbergs, Keeling and Wastell, I anticipate that my material will be categorised as somewhat more ambivalent.

Chapter 4

Major Works & Outcomes

Trees as Farms presents a new framework for investigation and research based on a previous project *Shadows of Gariibaldi*, completed in 2007 (Fig. 18). My intention has been to consider a comprehensive range of methods, style and approach, and this has been represented by the ten different series of works I have generated.



Figure 18. Susie Goodall, *Chinese Coin*, 2007, Oil on canvas, 90x90cm.

Figure 19. Susie Goodall, *Chinese Coin*, 2007, (detail).

The first painting I produced, *Wagon Wheel Plantation*, 2008 (Fig. 24), followed the same style that I used for *Shadows of Garibaldi* – a symbolic object hand-painted with patterns of native Tasmanian Flora (Fig. 19). To move away from such meticulous detail I have been particularly interested in any tool that would enable me to be able to produce identical, repetitive motifs that best reflect the homogeneous leaves and branches, rows and patterns evident in tree farms. Early experimentation with rubber stamps, easily sourced from craft shops and online shopping sites, provided a wide variety of native leaves, gum nuts and other flora such as ferns and twigs. Unfortunately they are only really suitable to use on flat, absorbent surfaces and I soon came to the realisation that to utilise the stamps most effectively I would need to abandon oil paint on canvas, for watercolours or acrylics on card or paper.

The tacky, viscosity of the oil paint did not lend itself well to forming anything other than random, individual prints. The canvas was too textured to receive all of the paint, and also did not allow enough firm application of pressure required to produce an even imprint (Fig.20).



Figure 20. Susie Goodall, *Concept work #1 (Leaf Stamp)*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 40x50cm.

Ultimately using oil on canvas did not generate the effect that I desired to achieve; to have rows of leaves communicate the impression of them about to invade the farmscape like soldiers lined up in battle; or at least to appear as solitary, symmetrical groups. However, the experiment did contribute increased understanding of suggestion with form, and the knowledge that the patterns did not necessarily need to be systematic to convey my intentions.



Figure 21. Susie Goodall, *Concept work #2 (Horizontal)*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 40x50cm.



Figure 22. Susie Goodall, *Concept work #3 (Vertical)*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 30x30cm.

The next series I developed was based on the panoramic 'wide screen' view of the farmscape. The premise was to frame the scenery with tree trunks, both vertically and horizontally, to represent the dominance of the plantation over the pastoral property. These works were interesting but problematic in that regardless of the configuration (horizontal or vertical trunks) or even with the incorporation of branches and twigs, the 'tree trunks' simply resembled a rustic farm fence (Figs. 21 & 22) and therefore were not representational of the project's concerns with tree farms.

Dissatisfied by the lack of clarity of these outcomes I focussed the ensuing months on researching relevant literature and gathering photographic images of *Eucalyptus nitens* trees. Exploration into these plantations led me to the realisation that the next set of paintings should reflect the basic presupposition that I had reached; that the tree farms were slowly but steadily devouring the traditional farmland and spreading across the landscape like a virus. At the time my viewpoint was theoretically ambivalent; our family farm borders forestry and private plantations (and has faced negative issues associated with their existence) yet I have also been directly employed in the forest industry. For the majority of my project I was not concerned about my unbiased status as I did not feel it was an essential element necessary to my research, and also that it was a perspective I thought directly reflected the visual implications of plantation farming. However, I had come to the realisation that to be able to convey my opinion in paint and canvas, I would require a powerful metaphor that would clearly and boldly provide the observer with a strong message.

I began contemplating the 'devouring' aspect and the perception I had developed of the tree farms eating into, or consuming, the traditional agricultural farmland. This reflection revived a memory of an unusual phenomenon I had been shown on a university field trip many years ago; the 'plough tree' at Tamar Island wetlands, near Launceston. The 'plough tree' is the curious occurrence of an old oak intertwining itself with a man-made object. On the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service website an interesting tale claims that at the end of the 19th century an old farm plough was tied against an oak tree by the lessee of the island; a farmer by the name of Thomas Robinson, as a symbol of grief for his late wife (Parks & Wildlife Service Tasmania 2009). In the subsequent 100 years since this act, and without any human interference, the oak has slowly engulfed the plough, the rusted farm implement now embedded deeply in the bark and trunk of the old tree. What a superb metaphor to represent the main point of my argument.

The first painting inspired by this tree was *Plough Tree #1*, 2009, (Fig. 23). In it I aimed to focus on the disparity between the texture of the bark and the planate metallic surface of the plough. For the leaves in this piece I have used the Fragonard oil colour 'Light English Green' and they are painted similarly to those depicted in *Wagon Wheel Plantation* (Fig. 24). The ploughed paddock in the background was partially inspired by Van Gogh's *Ploughed Field*, 1888 (Fig. 25). The composition of my work is quite literal in its attempt at representing various elements of my subject, and its related topic, as it depicts the entire tree. However, whilst the subject matter is unorthodox, it does not fully embrace the ethereal or emotive elements that featured in *Wagon Wheel Plantation*, 2008 or *Chinese Coin*, 2007.



Figure 23. Susie Goodall, *Plough Tree #1*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 90x90cm.



Figure 24. Susie Goodall, *Wagon Wheel Plantation*, (detail) 2008, Oil on canvas, 60x90cm.

Figure 25. Vincent van Gogh, *The Ploughed Field*, 1888, Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 92 cm, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands.

Still toying with the idea of the tree plantations engulfing, or devouring the traditional agricultural farmland, I produced a piece titled *Calf Tree* 2009 (Fig. 26). Initially I thought the painting would be whimsical and perhaps a little jocular, but the actual result was a far cry from this – the twisting and contorting limbs, and sadness in the animal's eyes invoked a sense of anguish and despondency; a disturbing, and yet a satisfying, personification of

the tree consuming the farm animal. The Fragonard 'Light English Green' leaves are a prominent feature in the background of this painting, and at this point start to shift away from their physical resemblance to *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves. Subconsciously I continued to stylise these leaves in this manner throughout many of the works that followed, until I came to the realisation that the foliage had distinctly evolved from its original intended species.



Figure 26. Susie Goodall, *Calf Tree*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 60x90cm.

Prior to this however, I continued to revisit the Tamar Island plough tree theme with the intention of centering on the relationship between the object and the tree, regardless of the tree being an oak and not a forest plantation species. Resolving to avoid becoming too literal again, I decided to zoom in and focus on segments of the plough and the tree, producing textured paintings of coloured bark and pattern alongside the harsh coldness of the metal implement. An example of these works is *Plough Tree #4*, 2009 (Fig. 27) which again features the bold Fragonard 'Light English Green' leaves. Whilst I had determined that the use of these leaves in my work was an excellent representation of trees, but as mentioned earlier, essentially they were not representative of tree farms. The leaves were homogenous and relatively uniform but had evolved into a leaf form which was not representative of any *Eucalyptus* species.



Figure 27. Susie Goodall, *Plough Tree #4*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 40x50cm.

An important shift occurred when a documentary on ABC Television's 'Australian Story' highlighted the possibility of negative health impacts from *Eucalyptus nitens* plantations situated around the water catchment for the township of St Helens, on the East coast of Tasmania (I have written about this in detail in Chapter 2). In relation to my studio practice, this documentary and subsequent media reports, highlighted two new, interesting hypotheses that I could investigate. Firstly the leaves that I had been reluctant to renounce now had a genuine potency and significance to my work, (despite the fact that their form had evolved into a shape that no longer seemed characteristic with that of *Eucalyptus nitens*). The second hypothesis was the selective breeding of the plants in the nursery, and its analogous resemblance to intensive breeding practices used in the enhancement of genetic blood lines in agricultural stock – again highlighting similarities between traditional pastoral farming and tree farming practices.

I produced two small test paintings based loosely on an auxiliary series *Claustrum: A Phobia of Place*, produced for a solo exhibition in February of 2010. *Claustrum* was a series of paintings that represented the personal journey of dealing with my claustrophobia. The whole concept of *Claustrum* was intended to be quite unrelated to my *Trees As Farms* research - an aside to help reignite the passion for my studio research practice, but it inadvertently influenced the project. Elements of creativity have a habit of cross pollinating and fostering in other projects, and this was no exception. *Claustrum #3*, 2009, (Fig. 28) is a typical example of the paintings from the *Claustrum* series and explicitly shows my use of roses (another repetitive floral motif) and barbed wire, as metaphors for confinement and closed in space.



Figure 28. Susie Goodall, *Claustrum #3*, 2009, Oil on canvas 60x90cm.

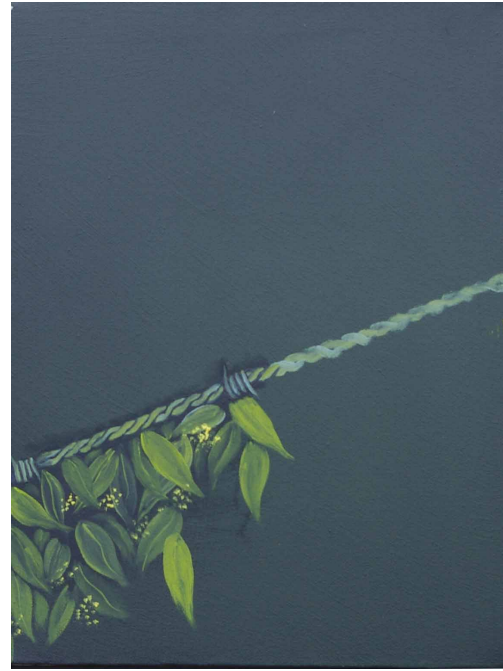


Figure 29. Susie Goodall, *Concept work #4 (barbed wire & leaves)*, 2010, Oil on canvas 40x50cm.

Concept work #4, 2010 (Fig. 29) demonstrates an attempt to replicate the stylisation of *Claustrum*, but I felt that it lacked the same attributes so I discontinued this approach. However, I felt that the continued use of barbed-wire in my paintings was worth pursuing and my use of the flora motif in the work was also of value.

Mid to late 2010, *Eucalyptus* leaves, or my generic interpretation of them, again took a strong foothold in my studio practice. Still obstinately working with oils on canvas I produced a series of six works featuring the dark backgrounds akin to the earlier *Shadows of Garibaldi* with a faint halo, or shadow of light, in the centre. An inanimate, small, farm object (ear tag, electric fence peg, or wool bale clip) hovered atop this halo, covered with Fragonard 'Light English Green' leaves. Later, I emphasised the light by evolving it into a stronger circle of light to represent a spotlight or 'looking through a keyhole' illusion. This work was to become the foundation for my final presentation. *E Nitens Electric Fence Peg*, 2010, (Fig. 30) demonstrates the 'halo' effect, whilst *E Nitens Insulator*, 2010 (Fig. 31) is an example of the 'spotlight' or 'keyhole' approach.

A slight variation was an attempt to put two or more 'light circles' on one canvas, and larger canvasses (72x72cm) but this formula conjured the illusion of movement, as though the circles were bouncing around the painting, and detracted from the desire to have the object ambiguous and mysterious. I also found the use of the Fragonard 'Light English Green' too dominating and controlled, while my leaves were becoming even more homogenous and un-eucalypt like. Over the ensuing months I attempted to study the leaves in more detail, observed the various colours during growth and decomposition, and investigated noxious pests that may be a threat to tree plantations.



Figure 30. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Electric Fence Peg*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 45x45cm.

Figure 31. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Electric Fence Insulator*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 45x45cm.

Nitens Leaves with Locust, 2011, (Fig. 32) was the result of experimentation with symbols and metaphors; involving insects renowned for their ability to destroy food crops. It also featured the new stylisation of the eucalypt leaves. I dispensed with this approach however, as I felt that the work appeared to be more scientific illustration than metaphorical evocation and not territory I wished to explore for this project.



Figure 32. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Leaves with Locust* 2011, Oil on canvas, 45x45cm.

Figure 33. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Dung Beetle*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 45x45cm.

The Sirex wasp was also given consideration and some research as I have painted European wasps in the past and thoroughly enjoyed recreating their bright colours and markings, however as this particular wasp infests pine trees, the parable would be of the

plantations under threat and not the farmland; the opposite of what I wanted to convey. In latter stages I also investigated the usefulness of the dung beetle but found difficulties with painting a black exoskeleton against a dark background. One solution was to use a metallic silver oil paint – this is shown in *Nitens Dung Beetle*, 2011 (Fig. 33) – but with the sapling piercing the insect's back, I felt the premise was again too literal.

In April 2011 I conceded that I would need to temporarily move away from brushes and canvas and utilise photography and digital manipulation techniques to really push the subject matter further than I had attempted thus far. This investigation was a deliberate move away from my painting studio practice, and involved a broad exploration of pattern, shape and form. Figure 34 is an example of how the scanned images of leaves were duplicated and manipulated, colour changed and organised in lines and various other configurations.

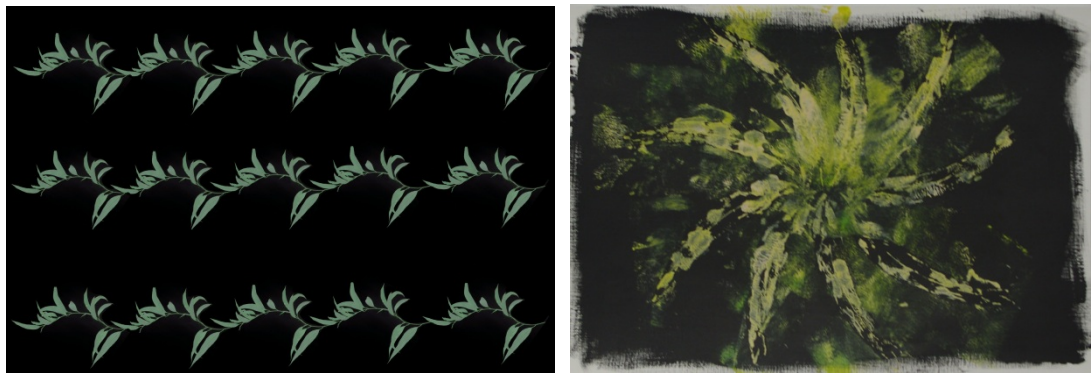


Figure 34. Susie Goodall, *Eucalyptus Leaves Photogram Black/Green*, 2011, A4 digital colour print.

Figure 35. Susie Goodall, *Leaf Printing Concept Work #1*, 2011, Acrylic on A3 canvas paper.

Determined to utilise some of these ideas in paint I ventured back into the studio and engaged with dried leaves, sponges and acrylic paint on primed card, shunning the use of brushes. This was an interesting departure and some of the images produced were quite spatial and captivating (Fig.35). The exercise was liberating and refreshing, as well as a valuable lesson in layering techniques for pattern and form.

For the body of work I produced in mid-2011 I used canvas boards to provide a firm surface to attach self-adhesive lettering, whilst still able to give a solid, textured surface suitable for oil painting. Text and lettering had rarely made an appearance in my work other than in the form of a signature or place descriptor. My rationale in using lettering for this project was in the ability to dramatically reduce the composition by removing the still life object, yet still retain an explicit reference to farm property – principally I would still be continuing to embed the memory of farm objects in my work.

The lettering I have used is mass produced and therefore symmetrical and linear, and was painted to merge in with the background and underpainting. As an aside, incorporating text allowed me the ability to utilise farm items that would be difficult to represent as a still object - for example: a silage stack, fertiliser or a water trough. *Silage*, 2011 (Figs.36 & 37) shows the discreet way I attempted the incorporation of words using a 46x61cm canvas board and 4cm self-adhesive craft letters.



Figure 36. Susie Goodall, *Silage*, 2011, Oil on canvas board, canvas letters, 46x61cm.

Figure 37. Susie Goodall, *Silage*, 2011, (detail).

Further works were attempted on 38x76cm elliptical canvasses but ventured into a different field of enquiry. Jon Cattapan, during his Greene Street Gallery residency in New York, successfully negotiated this territory without his works alluding to Victoriana. However, with the incorporation of flora (in my work) the reference to Victoriana became unavoidable, creating a misleading shift in direction for my project.

I felt that the faint, delicate text was almost too understated so I procured some larger 20cm high papier-mâché letters, making the move into three-dimensional territory. The projection of each character meant that every plane had to be accounted for and painted, and this instigated a whole new range of issues to contend with: their arrangement, their symmetry, and most interestingly an indifference to being attached to canvas. They were clearly individual works in their own right (Fig. 38). I had a mixed response to this work; whilst working in 3D was an interesting departure from my regular studio practice, the project had lost its camouflage element and ambiguity.



Figure 38. Susie Goodall, *Fence*, 2011, Oil on papier- mâché, 20cm high x 4cm wide x variable length.

I continued to expand my exploration into three dimensional territory and made an attempt at an installation piece featuring milk cartons (Fig. 39). Perhaps it was due to the sheer magnitude of the material I had available to work with on the subject, peer influences, or perhaps it was simply due to wanting to attempt something novel and fresh, well away from my chosen medium. Whilst working in this medium was an interesting departure, I decided to return to my regular studio practice and concentrate on incorporating mysterious, eerie and intriguing elements in my paintings.



Figure 39. Susie Goodall, *Milk Carton Concept* (artist's impression), 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable.

Returning to my staple materials of oil and canvas, and utilising the blue and silver hues used on the papier mâché letters for *Fence*, 2011, I produced two canvasses featuring dark backgrounds, common farming objects and *Eucalyptus nitens* saplings, building on the strengths ascertained from the *Nitens Leaves and Objects* series (Figs. 40 & 41).



Figure 40. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Insulator (Blue)*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 60x60cm.

Figure 41. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Ear Tag (Blue)*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 60x60cm.

Following on from these works in October 2011, I produced some small (45 x 45cm) paintings using a potato; both as a printing tool as well as the main figure in the composition. The background in the initial piece was similar to those depicted in *Nitens Leaves & Objects* but coloured slightly to still convey a sinister mood (Fig. 42).



Figure 42. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Potato*, 2011, Oil on canvas, 45 x 45cm.

Eucalyptus nitens remains a fundamental element in the work; present as a seedling growing from the potato – a new life form emanating from the vegetable. The sprouting plant is consuming the last remnants of vitality from the tuber and is a metaphor for the tree plantations absorbing the life blood from the farming community. These works were a valid exploration, and led to possibly the most assertive series of paintings I have produced for this project, vehemently and blindly pursuing a line of enquiry that aesthetically was diametrically opposed to my previous bodies of work. The concept was not only a bold

literal connection – ‘this is what used to grow, this is what grows now’ but also featured a bright colour palette across several different picture planes (Fig. 43).



Figure 43. Susie Goodall, *E. Nitens Allium Cepa (Onions)* 2011, Oil on canvas 60x60cm.

Figure 44. Elizabeth Weckes, *Der SproB* 2003/04, oil on canvas 190 x 290cm, private collection.

This was an interesting and exciting departure, but the works failed on a number of fronts, ranging from the unsubtle literal connections to the clumsy, awkward style of painting. Inspired by German artist Elizabeth Weckes (refer Chapter 3) *Songs for Skylla* series, on reflection I can clearly see in this series that my approach does not encompass any of the painterly qualities, curiosities or quirkiness of Wecke’s images, for example *Der SproB* 2003/04 (Fig. 44). Intense tonality, imparted from the use of dark spaces and hints of light were essential elements in the most effective paintings for *Trees As Farms*; encapsulating ambiguity, mystery and a sense of demise. These qualities are not evident in *E. Nitens Allium Cepa (Onions)* 2011.

Nevertheless this somewhat exotic tangent identified a need to locate, focus on, and return to the most pertinent elements of my studio practice. This was accomplished by gathering together a selection of all available works to date and displaying them in chronological order on the empty walls of the School of Visual and Performing Arts, Inveresk (Fig. 45). This undertaking revealed the effectiveness of the *Nitens Leaves & Objects* series (refer Chapter 4). With its intense tonality it continued to stand out as the body of work that was the most resolved, and also successfully achieved my aims of pictorializing uncertainty and loss.



Figure 45. SVPA upper level wall space, entire body of work display, 13/12/11, digital photographic image: S. Goodall.

Once I had established that the *Nitens Leaves & Objects* series was predominately the most engaging choice for the final body of work, I set about investigating ways of broadening my exploration; contemplating ways I could create paintings of this nature and also incorporate further dimensions that might intensify the overall emotive ambiguity of the work. It was around this time I reconnected with the work of Imants Tillers and his use of small canvas boards in a modular, multi-panelled format and considered the possibility of utilising a similar arrangement. Particular reference is given to *Kangaroo Blank*, 1988, (Fig. 46) along with the series *Nature Speaks*, 1998-2000.

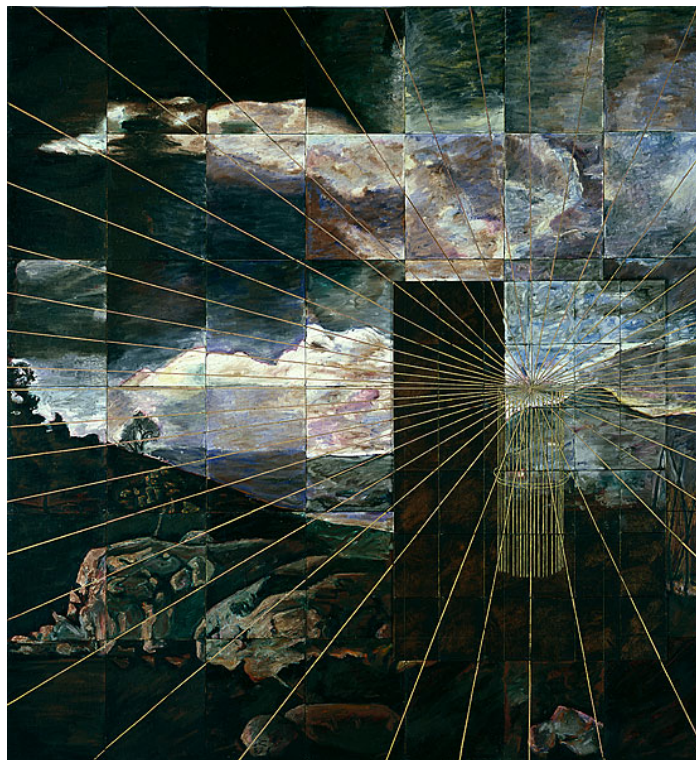


Figure 46. Imants Tillers, *Kangaroo Blank* 1988, mixed media 213x195cm, collection of the artist.

However, despite being informed by Tillers, the body of work emanating from this series is unique in several important ways. While I have divided the picture plane into a grid format, I have incorporated a far less stringent arrangement, facilitated by the removal of random sections of the grid; enabling the images to be broken down (Fig. 47). The voids not only provide ambiguity and mystery, but also a sense of demise and loss. I hesitate to use the

word pixilation as it immediately forms a connection with digital media, but the work is pixelated in respect to the deconstruction of the grid. The use of the grid also relates to patterns familiar with common farming methods; the mapping of paddocks and fences, tilled mounds of soil ready for planting, and crops sown in economical lines. Similarly it is also prominent in tree farming practices where monocultural species are planted in rows of rigid formation to allow even growing and for efficiencies in pruning and harvesting.

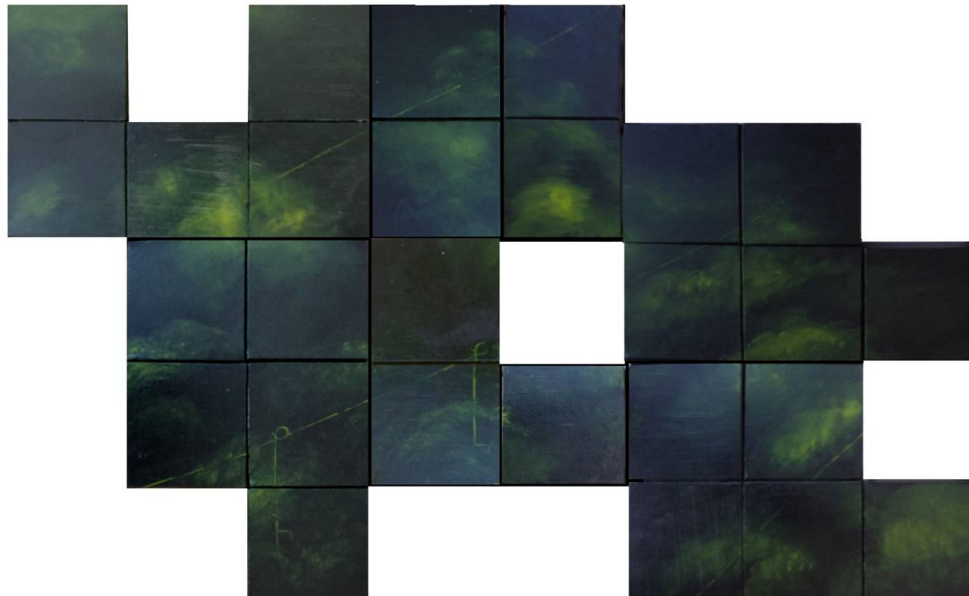


Figure 47. Susie Goodall, *Electric Fence Obscurity*, 2012, 75x120cm.

Fences have been incorporated into my final body of work not only for the obvious subject utilisation as a common farm object, but significantly I have featured fencing for its specific association with segregating and bordering off sections of land. When a traditional agricultural property is converted into a tree farm most of the chattels such as sheds, water troughs and other utilities, are made redundant and are removed. However, fences and gates are retained for their practical functionality; essentially to keep neighbouring stock and other pest animals out of the plantation.

Other elements previously explored – including ear tags, electric fence insulators, stamped leaves and gumboots – have been incorporated into the final works. These remnants of farming practice evoke displacement and loss, which in *Ear Tag Evanescence*, 2012 (Fig. 48), is reinforced by removing almost all vestiges of colour, a deliberate shift from the use of 'Light English Green' in order to heighten the sense of desolation.



**Figure 48. Susie Goodall, *Ear Tag Evanescence*, 2012,
Oil on canvas, (26 panels) dimensions variable.**

I have selected the most salient elements demonstrated in my studio practice for this project. These include the subtle sombre fragmentation and movement of a carefully chosen selection of common agricultural objects. The understated reductive elements, along with the grid formation and pixilation utilised in the final body of work, encapsulates those aspects required to represent the significance of the tree farms on the visual transformation of the agricultural landscape. They are also representative of the effects plantations have on not only the visual changes to the rural landscape, but to the environment and affected rural communities.

Conclusion

Trees As Farms: painting the new landscape has been a far-reaching investigation into a topic that arose out of the silent, unintelligible presence of tree farms on agricultural land around my local area and across Tasmania. Entrenched between concern for the family farm; and the issues that arise with neighbouring forestry and private plantations, and my employment in the forest industry; where I was able to witness the positive benefits to the economy, the subject was originally one I could form a neutral viewpoint on. However, over the course of the project my research for *Trees As Farms* began to influence my initial perception of tree plantations being innocuous, and I began to regard them as invasive and undesirable.

As the project developed I was able to build upon, and improve on the skills in my visual art practice. *Trees As Farms* presented a sound framework to utilise a comprehensive range of methods, styles and approaches, represented by a body of work split across ten different series. The original conceptual work featured native flora, both hand-painted and cloned using rubber stamps; the latter and oil paint difficult to manage at first but eventually controlled and utilised successfully in the final body of work. The recurring motif of *Eucalyptus nitens* leaves that appeared in the majority of my paintings, often present in a nondescript, generic form, eventually became a potent element. When the 'Australian Story – Something In The Water' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2010) documentary aired it provided fresh and exciting material to examine and made me determined to continue to utilise the *Eucalyptus nitens* leaf motif as a crucial metaphor in my painting practice.

Trees As Farms was conceptualised in August 2008, at a time when tree plantations were rapidly expanding in my local district, and forest companies were relentlessly converting prime traditional farmland into timber stands at a rate that caused alarm to local primary producers. Buoyed by management investment schemes, government support and low real estate prices for agricultural land, the industry was experiencing rapid growth. Four years later these same plantations are almost worthless, sitting idly awaiting maturity, harvesting, and in all probability, conversion back to traditional agricultural crops or pasture. Due to political and economic factors the forest industry is at a standstill, and in one of the worst predicaments ever imagined. The eerie, foreboding, homogenous characteristics of plantation forests remain, but are present in a different form; once they were detested for their expansion into prime traditional agricultural land, now they are despised for being a constant reminder of untenable investments and unemployment.

Hypothetically I contemplate what effect the current forest industry situation would have on *Trees As Farms* were the project to continue for another year. In reality I am satisfied that despite the current change in the political and economic environment, I have fulfilled the purpose of my research investigation. The project has reflected a deep consideration into the impacts, both positive and negative, of timber plantations in traditional farming areas. Discourses of geography and land use, biology, economics and industry have contributed to a multivalent perspective of tree farms. My literature review and pragmatic research has provided a contextual reference to ensure that the paintings for *Trees As Farms* articulate the transformation and subsequent demise of traditional cropping and pasture land into a monocultural homogenous timber plantation.

The repetitive leaf motif used in the final body of work symbolises tree plantations engulfing agricultural land; the latter metaphorically represented by common farming objects. *Trees As Farms* features a divided picture plane utilising a multi-panelled grid format. Sections of the grid are removed to represent a sense of loss. The missing sections are symbolic of the disappointment felt when completing a jigsaw only to find several pieces of sky missing from the puzzle. However, in this painted representation the disappointment is augmented to embody the emotional responses to the impacts tree farming has had on local communities and the environment.

Trees As Farms recognises that the transformation of the agricultural landscape is not just relevant to the visual aspects of the rural countryside but signifies a much deeper physical permutation. The conversion from traditional crops or pasture to tree plantations profoundly impacts on the environment as well as the people of the local communities they encompass and consume. The current forest industry situation may have temporarily halted the urgent compulsion to reforest the pastoral farmscape, but the existing tree farms remain; sombre, pitiful and of little value until their maturity. The research conducted for *Trees As Farms* is still as relevant as what it was at commencement, and at present is an apt representation of the anguish and despondency felt by those suffering from investing in a now struggling forest industry.

The final body of work presented in *Trees As Farms* is dark and sombre, with the incomplete grid format providing an air of ethereal ambiguity and mystery. The work silently expresses a sense of loss, felt from the visual transformation of the landscape as well as toward the more pertinent, fundamental effects on the environment and local communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Context of Theory

- a) Natural disasters such as drought, wildfire and flood can all take their toll on the economic viability of the farming business, and other outside influences including poor stock prices, high expenses for fertiliser, equipment and other necessities, interest rate rises and the state of the world economy, can all play their part to leave the family with no choice but sell up and leave the property. Until the recent downturn in the forest industry, private tree plantation companies were able to offer attractive prices to landowners with properties on the real estate market. Whilst agricultural land had experienced a significant downturn in value during this time, the opposite was the case with the rates offered for conversion to plantation, and therefore an enticing prospect to farmers wanting to sell.

- b) Although tree plantations were a significant employer in the forestry sector, providing employment to tree planters, pruners, harvesting contractors, truck drivers and so on, it was rare and in most cases unfeasible, for these individuals to live in the local community of, let alone live on the property that they were working on. Modern agricultural practices and equipment have also led to a fall in population to rural areas. For example a property of several hundred acres could once sustain two, possibly three families and their offspring, whereas current farming practices can allow a property double this size be managed by one single entity or partnership. As a result small rural communities and towns have experienced significant downturns in the number of its residents over the past 50 years or so, and these numbers have been ravaged even more by the rise in traditional agricultural properties converted to tree plantations. This has resulted in fewer shops, facilities and services and as a consequence of the loss of these amenities there is a subsequent demise of community spirit and belonging. Not surprisingly this has caused an undercurrent of inhospitality from farmers towards the tree plantation companies and their large scale plantation developments, an attitude which is further fanned by environmental concerns.

- c) Green lobby groups and some community organisations have raised concerns about the high water consumption by tree plantations particularly in their initial years of growth, and the detrimental effects that tree plantations allegedly have on water catchments and drinking water supplies.

- d) Despite the Forest Practices Code (Forest Practices Board 2000, p. 89) clearly stating that 'aerial spraying should not be conducted when there is a risk of drift into streamside reserves' the issue continues to be highly contentious and of concern to all residents and communities encompassed by ever expanding areas of plantation forest.
- e) As Australia has moved into the 21st century its populous has become anxious about reports of worldwide global warming, and greenhouse gas emissions. Gary Bacon writes in his article 'The Push for Plantations' (Keeney & Abbott 2005 n.p.) 'Australia, as a major energy producer and exporter, faces difficulties with greenhouse gas balance sheets. Carbon sequestration by millions of planted trees reduces the net level emissions.' Whilst Bacon is clearly writing in support of the tree plantation industry, his carbon storage claims are solidly supported by international scientific research, and are not disputed by green faction groups.
- f) 'Something in the Water' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2010) reported that oyster farmers; who were witnessing irregularities and deaths with their shellfish in Georges Bay at St Helens, and a general practitioner, Dr Alison Bleaney; who noticed what she thought was an unusual occurrence of rare cancers, teamed up with Dr Marcus Scammell, a marine ecologist and at their own expense, conducted a series of tests to investigate the water quality of the Georges River. The test results, known as the Scammell Report, were initially very alarming – even dry weather water samples showed toxicity; meaning that the water was constantly toxic. Further tests revealed that the toxins weren't a result of aerial pesticides as first thought, but that the noxious foam was actually being caused by the *Eucalyptus nitens* plantation trees surrounding the area, more specifically from the leaves of the tree.

As there has been no other documented occurrence of this species polluting any other waterways in Australia it led to speculation that the *Eucalyptus nitens* planted in Tasmania must have been genetically manipulated or modified to show such elevated toxicity levels. This was immediately disputed by the forest industry and, in an interview on February 24, with the Examiner Newspaper Williams, R (2010), Forest Industries Association executive Terry Edwards claimed that any enhancements to the species were purely from selective breeding. In the same way that farmers select the bulls that produce the best progeny Mr Edwards goes on to say 'we select the most vigorous growing seedlings from the nursery'. This is an intriguing analogy that illustrated an unexpected parallel between tree farming and livestock practices.

Regardless of how the leaves have reached this stage, the fact remains that they have been proven to be toxic Forestry Tasmania (2010) states that 'all eucalypts contain oils that have natural antiseptic/antibiotic properties when they are concentrated... these oils are toxic if ingested in large quantities' but also adds '*E. nitens* has lower levels of oils than do most other *Eucalypts* in Tasmanian native forests'.

After the program was aired, a panel of experts was immediately established by the Tasmanian state government to conduct an independent inquiry into the Scammell Report. People living in communities surrounded by stands of *Eucalyptus nitens* plantation, particularly those living in the St Helens district, anxiously awaited the results of the inquiry.

In June 2010, the panel found no evidence to support the claims made in the Scammell Report and Premier David Bartlett, along with Independent Member for Apsley, Tania Rattray, were outraged at the negative publicity the story had generated for the St Helens community, at the damage caused to the local fishing industry and Tasmania's national reputation. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation conducted an investigation into their own editorial standards and found flaws with their contextual accuracy and balance (Australian broadcasting Corporation 2011).

Appendix 2:

Documentation of Assessment Exhibition

List of Works

1. *Electric Fence Consternation*, 2012
Oil on canvas (29 panels)
Dimensions variable
Figures 1-2

2. *Electric Fence Obscurity*, 2012
Oil on canvas (27 panels, each measuring 15x15cm)
Total dimensions 75x120cm
Figure 3

3. *Ear Tag Evanescence*, 2012
Oil on canvas (26 panels)
Dimensions variable
Figures 4-5

4. *E. Nitens Electric Fence Peg, Flora & Transcendental*, 2010-12
Oil on canvas (7 panels, each measuring 45x45cm)
Total dimensions 135x180cm
Figure 6

5. *E. Nitens Gumboot, Flora & Transcendental*, 2010-12
Oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm)
Total dimensions 135x180cm
Figures 7 & 9

6. *E. Nitens Electric Fence Insulator, Flora & Transcendental*, 2010-12
Oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm)
Dimensions variable
Figures 8 & 9



Figure 1.

Electric Fence Consternation, 2012, (installation view) oil on canvas (29 panels) dimensions variable

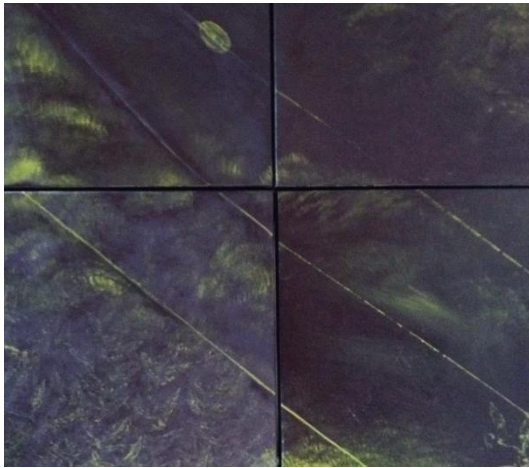


Figure 2.

Electric Fence Consternation, 2012, (detail)



Figure 3.

Electric Fence Obscurity, 2012, oil on canvas (27 panels, each measuring 15x15cm) total dimensions 75x120cm

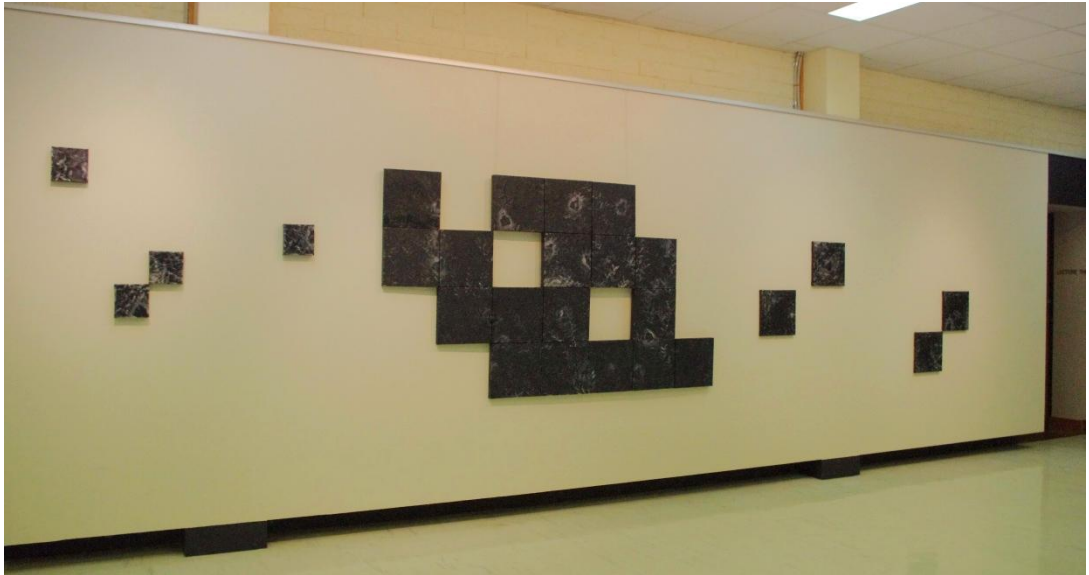


Figure 4.
Ear Tag Evanescence, 2012, (installation view) oil on canvas (26 panels) dimensions variable



Figure 5.
Ear Tag Evanescence, 2012, (detail)



Figure 6.

E. Nitens Electric Fence Peg, Flora & Transcendental, 2010-12, oil on canvas (7 panels, each measuring 45x45cm) total dimensions 135x180cm



Figure 7.

E. Nitens Gumboot, Flora & Transcendental, 2010-12, oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm) total dimensions 135x180cm

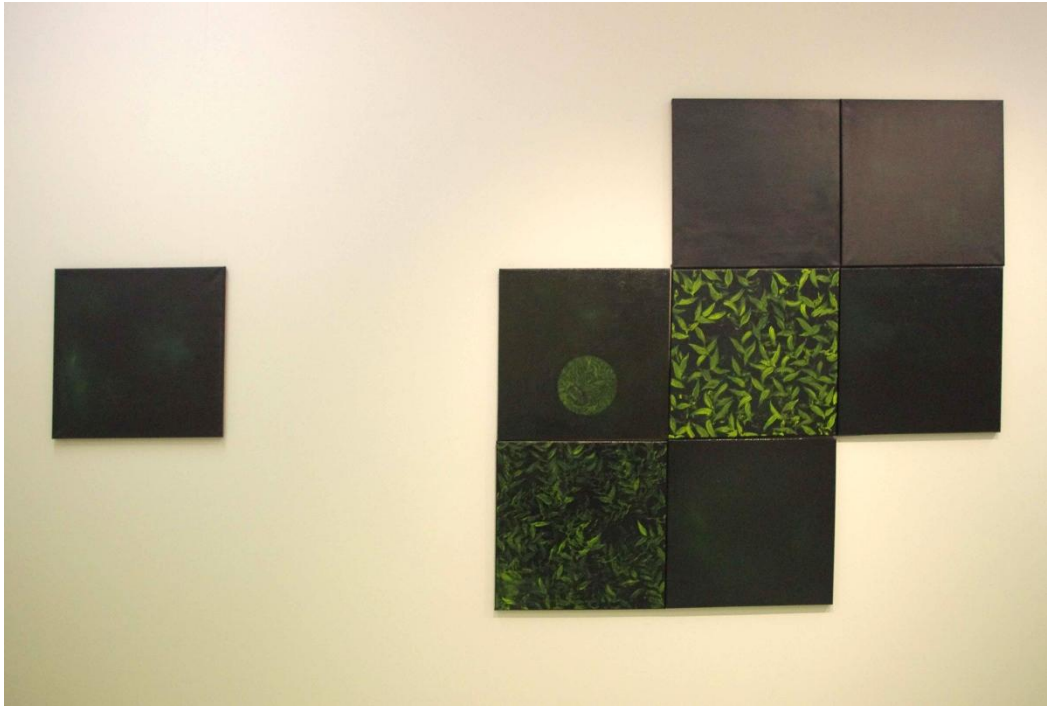


Figure 8.

E. Nitens Electric Fence Insulator, Flora & Transcendental, 2010-12, oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm) dimensions variable



Figure 9.

Composite image (installation view) of *E. Nitens Gumboot, Flora & Transcendental*, 2010-12, (installation view) oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm) total dimensions 135x180cm, and *E. Nitens Electric Fence Insulator, Flora & Transcendental*, 2010-12, oil on canvas (8 panels, each measuring 45x45cm) dimensions variable